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ABSTRACT

Research and evaluation staff members in schools and school districts are frequently called on to answer questions about the quality of schools. Responding merely with test scores is not sufficient, because it is important to communicate information about the total educational program in the district. Additional measures are available. Characteristics of the student body that should be communicated are: (1) attendance, enrollment, and graduation rates; (2) the participation of community members in school activities; (3) the diversity of the student body; and (4) the stability of the student body. Characteristics of the staff that should be communicated include staff experience and staff development efforts and programs. The community should be informed about programs for students, including dropout prevention, tutoring, and enrichment efforts. Achievement should be demonstrated through test scores, feedback on achievement after students leave the school, and information about excellence and performance beyond test scores. The school environment should be described, and the fiscal situation in which the school operates should be public knowledge. (SLD)

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# Communicating scholastic success

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Research and Evaluation staff often receive numerous telephone calls from people who want to know which school is the best in the district -- or which one has the highest test scores. Invariably, these people equate the best with highest scores. What most of these people want is a school that will challenge their children intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially. And, they believe that if their children are with those students who have the highest scores -- that is, the best, by their standards -- then their children will be better.

In light of this expectation, you should present the most complete and impartial picture of your schools to your students, their parents, and the community. However, just sending a report on test scores, even though the scores may be above the state, national, or district average, is insufficient because you must communicate about the total educational program in your district. But what else can you use to measure your district's performance in preparing students for life?

Additional measures are available. Some require effort to collect and organize; others are easily gathered and summarized if you outline and implement a process. By collecting the information in some of these other important indicators of your district's work, you may be better able to interpret and use standardized test data to improve your educational program. More important, your community will learn more about what education is as a profession.

**Attendance**

- Absences: students
- Absences: staff
- Tardies: students
- Tardies: staff
- Percent of students and staff with perfect attendance or fewer than x absences
- Student participation in before/after school programs
- Parent participation in PTO meetings, back-to-school nights, special programs
- Total enrollment
- Graduation rate
- Dropout rate

**Non-student participation**

- PTO membership
- Number and types of parent volunteers
- Number and types of special programs, fundraisers, etc. (for example, RIF, Jr. Great Books)

**Diversity**

- Student population by sex
- Staff population by sex
- Student population by ethnic group
- Staff population by ethnic group
- Percent of students who receive special educational help
- Percent of staff by responsibility (for example, regular classroom teacher, resource room teacher, clerical staff, support staff)
- Percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals
- Percent of students who have a home language other than English
- Percent of students who are eligible for Chapter 1 services

**Stability**

- Percent of students who are new to school/district
- Percent of staff who are new to school/district

**Staff experience**

- Average number of years of experience in the district
- Average number of years of experience in the school
- Average number of years of experience in education

**Staff development**

- In-service programs for teachers
- Peer coaching or teaching programs
- Collaborative programs between business and industry and the district
- Collaborative programs between colleges and universities and the district

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- Coursework or training taken by staff during the year and during the summer
- Staff and school grants (for example, skunk works, mini-grants)

**Programs for students**

- Study skills
- Counseling services (including vocational, post-secondary)
- Dropout prevention
- Students at risk
- Dropout recovery
- Preschool
- Peer or cross-age tutoring
- Community: Big Brother, Big Sister, Scouts, 4H
- Summer school
- Critical thinking, creative problem-solving

**Achievement**

- Students' performance after they leave: Feedback from middle and high schools on how well students are prepared in relation to students who attend other elementary or middle schools in the area
- Special projects by teachers, parents, and staff
- Faculty, staff, student awards, presentations, publications, honors
- Percent of staff with advanced degrees
- Standardized test scores
- Local assessment results
- Previous year's ITBS scores
- Test scores for cohorts (following the same group of students throughout their school careers)
- Distributions of test scores (percent of students who scored above the 75th percentile, below the 25th percentile, etc.
- Number of books checked out of the library per student
- Accreditation
- Number of National Merit Scholarship: qualifiers, semi-finalists, finalists
- Student retention rate and number
- Excellence rewards
- Average number of high school out-of-class accomplishments
- College entrance (SAT; ACT) examination averages

**Environment**

- Number of incidences of student vandalism
- Number of fights between students
- Types and numbers of disciplinary actions against students
- Special services at the school for:
  - physically handicapped students
  - emotionally handicapped students
  - socially handicapped students
  - mentally handicapped students
  - academically low-achieving students
  - academically gifted students
  - talented students (academic and nonacademic)
  - students from low-income families
  - students dominant in a language other than English
  - students with learning disabilities
  - students with behavioral problems
- Extracurricular activities at the school for students:
  - instrumental music
  - vocal music
  - sports
  - clubs
  - interest groups
- Number of hardbound library books per student
- Number of computer systems per x students
- Number of students who need (use) extended day services, both before and after school
- Average class size
- Student, teacher, administrator, staff support ratio
- Length of school day
- Length of school year
- Length of class periods
- Units required for graduation or advancement
- Average number of units taken in various subject areas
- Percent of students taking a foreign language (or other subjects)
- Average amount of homework required (by subject area)
- Percent of the school day of actual academic learning time

**Fiscal**

- Average teacher, administrator, staff support salary
- Expenditures per pupil
- Decentralized budget

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